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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 006753

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SUBJECT: FRANCE/COTE D'IVOIRE: ECOWAS MEETING FAILS TO
ENERGIZE PEACE PROCESS

REF: PARIS 6651

Classified By: Political-Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/
d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: MFA Cote d'Ivoire desk officer Montel on October 10 expressed frustration that the October 6 ECOWAS summit accomplished little in moving the peace process forward, although she identified a number of points made by ECOWAS that were helpful (condemnation of Afi N'guessan, affirmation of UN Security Council Resolution 1633, positive reference to UN and French forces in Cote d'Ivoire). Montel was unable to express optimism that the African Union, at its planned October 16-17 PSC meeting, would be able to do much more. The French were displeased that some of ECOWAS's recommendations to the AU had been leaked, especially the point about Gbagbo's continuing in power until elections take place. Montel reported French irritation that Ghana, China, and Russia in the UNSC Sanctions Committee had blocked at the 11th hour possible sanctions against Afi N'guessan. She said that South Africa's intention to resume an active role regarding Cote d'Ivoire seemed problematic, commenting that South Africans did not appear to grasp that the situation had changed since the period 18 months previously when South Africa was last active. END SUMMARY.

ECOWAS Meeting

12. (C) MFA Cote d'Ivoire desk officer Charlotte Montel on October 10 reviewed recent developments, beginning with the October 6 ECOWAS summit meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. She said that France was disappointed with the results of the meeting, which had failed to take decisive action that might have produced movement in the peace process. The meeting had begun badly, with ECOWAS's having to issue a statement on October 4 condemning FPI President Afi N'guessan for his earlier remarks suggesting that ECOWAS mediation efforts could lead to violence against citizens of ECOWAS member states residing in Cote d'Ivoire. ECOWAS had properly and forcefully criticized N'guessan for his remarks, but the episode had poisoned the atmosphere as the meeting began, Montel said.

13. (C) Montel reported that the GOF considered the summit final communique to be weak, "totally lacking guts," as she put it. It was devoid of concrete measures and consisted largely of observations. ECOWAS clearly wanted to pass the issue to the African Union and the October 16-17 PSC meeting. She said that it was entirely possible that the AU would in turn pass the issue to the UN Security Council. Montel said that several African leaders attending the recent

Francophonie Summit in Bucharest had told the French that the AU would not take a tough stance on Cote d'Ivoire and would pass the buck to the UN. Montel wondered whether the international community, occupied with so many other pressing issues, would or could re-engage vigorously in Cote d'Ivoire.

¶4. (C) Montel was able to find a few positive elements to the ECOWAS summit communique, however. The communique endorsed UN Security Council Resolution 1633 as the framework for resolving the Cote d'Ivoire crisis (communique paras 5 and 9). The communique indirectly praised PM Konan Banny (although not by name) and indirectly criticized President Gbagbo (communique para 6 -- "Commending the efforts made by the Ivoirian Government to accelerate the implementation of the roadmap . . ."). It suggested, again indirectly, that sanctions might be appropriate (communique para 9 -- "and recommend to the United Nations Security Council to take every necessary appropriate measure. . ."). Finally, the communique expressed support for the International Working Group (communique paras 5 and 10) and appreciation for UN and French forces in Cote d'Ivoire (communique para 10). Montel said that these points were well and good but that the ECOWAS communique did little to achieve the goal of having Africans actively engaged in ending the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire.

African Union and Leaks

¶5. (C) Montel noted communique para 11, which stated that the summit participants would make their recommendations to the AU's PSC in anticipation of the October 16-17 meeting. These recommendations, according to Montel, were to have been conveyed to the AU on a confidential basis. However, they apparently had been leaked to the press, which reported that

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these recommendations included extending Gbagbo's presidency until elections are held, increasing PM Konan Banny's power, and continuing the disarmament program. Montel said that the Liberians were the apparent source of the leak. She regretted the leak, which allowed Gbagbo to argue that ECOWAS supported his continuation in power. The other two points (on increasing the PM's power and resuming disarmament) were not bad, she said, but leaking the point about Gbagbo was unfortunate.

Sanctions

¶6. (C) On the issue of sanctions against individuals, Montel regretted that Ghana, China, and Russia had blocked efforts in the UNSC Sanctions Committee to impose sanctions against Afi N'guessan. She said that the three countries had broken silence very late, which did not allow others much time to respond. She noted bitterly that they had thus blocked the international community from sanctioning an individual that ECOWAS had just condemned in very strong terms for inciting potential violence. Although not giving specifics, Montel indicated that France was continuing to work the issue in order to obtain Ghanaian, Chinese, and Russian cooperation on sanctions.

South Africa

¶7. (C) Montel deemed South Africa's intention to re-engage in the Cote d'Ivoire issue "not helpful." She said that South Africa's active engagement had ended about 18 months previously, with the Pretoria II process. Much had happened since then, including all of the work of the IWG pursuant to UNSCR 1633. South Africa, however, seemed not to recognize this and "tended to view everything as if we were still in the Pretoria II timeframe," Montel complained. She said that South Africa seemed to want to "Africanize" the Cote d'Ivoire issue -- rather than work through the UNSCR 1633/IWG framework -- and exert influence as the AU's mediator. Only Gbagbo seemed to want South Africa to re-engage, which itself was not a good sign, Montel said.

¶8. (C) Moreover, Montel expressed concern that South Africa would be well placed to create complications, since it would be present at the October 16-17 AU PSC meeting and would, in January 2007, begin its expected two-year tenure on the UN Security Council (see reftel, reporting other GOF discomfort with South Africa's presence on the Security Council). She worried that South Africa, if it so chose, could, beginning shortly, undo much of the IWG's work. She acknowledged that the UNSC 1633/IWG process was stalled, but she believed it would be an unfortunate waste of time, energy, and resources to abandon the process and start virtually from scratch again.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Although Montel's comments and much of her tone were negative regarding recent events, she did not project a defeatist attitude and indicated that these developments, albeit serious, were more in the nature of setbacks, of which there have already been many. She was disappointed that African states, acting within either the ECOWAS or African Union context, did not seem likely to take up the problem and move toward a solution. That would mean that the members of the international community already engaged in Cote d'Ivoire would have to continue to find a solution without much fresh support from Africa's regional bodies. END COMMENT.

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